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RUEHDG/AMEMBASSY SANTO DOMINGO
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RUEHPU/AMEMBASSY PORT AU PRINCE
RUEHSP/AMEMBASSY PORT OF SPAIN
RUEHUB/USINT HAVANA 0038
RUEHWN/AMEMBASSY BRIDGETOWN

UNCLAS SANTO DOMINGO 000005

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SUBJECT: Emboffs Visit DR-Haiti Border Region

REF: A) 08 SDO 770; B) 08 SDO 1717; C) SDO 1307

¶1. (SBU) SUMMARY: Polchief and Poloff traveled to the border town of Dajabon (located in the northwestern part of the Dominican Republic) with representatives from NGO Catholic Relief Services (CRS) from 11/30-12/01/2009. Poloffs met with labor lawyers from the Solidaridad Fronteriza NGO who advocate for Haitian migrants, the Haitian Consul and a representative from the Dominican Specialized Frontier Corps (CESFRONT) in Dajabon. Officials from NGOs and governmental agencies spoke about the serious challenges facing the border region, as well as issues that affect Haitian migrants and laborers, such as deportation/repatriation, racial profiling, violence and crime, human rights and labor complaints, as well as the need for more coordination with Haitian authorities to combat trafficking and human smuggling of Haitian women and children. END SUMMARY.

BACKGROUND

¶2. (SBU) The disparity in wealth and economic opportunities between the Dominican Republic (nominal per capita GDP of USD 4,992 in 2008) and Haiti (USD 790), leads many Haitians to migrate illegally to the DR in search of economic opportunities. The GoDR in its National Report to the UN Human Rights Council estimated that it hosts 900,000-1.2 million illegal immigrants, most of whom came from Haiti. Migration officials estimate that only 5 percent of Haitian migrants have proper documentation or temporary work permits to enter legally. The rest find their way across the border by well-established routes, individually or in groups, and often give bribes to border guards to cross at the check points. Haitian migrants, undocumented or documented, seek not only economic opportunities in the DR, but also access to Dominican medical and educational services, as well as abandoned housing. According to the Secretary of Public Health, the GoDR has spent over USD 56 million on health services to Haitians, undocumented or documented, at public hospitals throughout the country since 2005.

¶3. (SBU) Although the Dominican sugar industry has declined in recent years, the demand for Haitian laborers continues to grow in other economic sectors. Haitian migration has been an important contributor to the overall economic growth in the DR in recent years, though many Dominicans will not publicly admit this. According to labor lawyers from Solidaridad Fronteriza, Haitian laborers comprise 80 percent or more of the workers in the agricultural sectors, including sugar plantations. Furthermore, Haitians, illegal or legal, are heavily concentrated in the construction industry, in the tourist industry, in cleaning and domestic services, and in informal trade throughout the country. As mentioned in Ref C, Haitian laborers are often recruited by

Dominican employers to work as loggers in the illicit charcoal industry.

MARKET DAY-ECONOMIC BENEFITS FOR BOTH SIDES OF THE ISLAND

14. (U) Poloffs visited the border town of Dajabon on Market Day. Every Monday and Friday, approximately 20,000 people flow into Dajabon from Haiti to sell items and buy goods before being required by GoDR authorities to return home at 4:00 p.m. Border patrols are suspended during the day to allow free movement of goods and people across both sides of the frontier. There are concentric circles of security around areas of the Dajabon market, but this does not interfere with business of trading and selling during the day. The streets of Dajabon are crowded with hundreds of Dominicans and Haitians who peddle their wares on blankets and on sidewalks in the center of the town, selling goods of all sorts from agricultural products to used clothing, household items, cosmetics and children's toys. Up to USD 400,000 in trade occurs on any given market day, according to estimates.

15. (U) From the bridge that separates the two countries, Poloffs could see a skeletal steel structure erected on land adjacent to the Masacre River. The structure, according to Colonel Vargas Munoz of CESFRONT, will hold the new Dominican Customs and Migration offices, as well as the new cross-border market. The new market is intended to increase overall security control near the border and underscore the legitimacy of Haiti-Dominican cross-border trade. CESFRONT and CRS officials were unclear when construction of the cross-border market's infrastructure will be opened; the CESFRONT representative offered his candid opinion that the unfinished structure is already obsolete, and grossly insufficient for the market day crowds.

CESFRONT RESPONDS TO ILLICIT ACTIVITIES NEAR THE BORDER

16. (U) The Specialized Frontier Corps (CESFRONT), a border security task force, was established in September 2007 in part to curb the entry of undocumented and illegal migrants across the Haitian-Dominican border. There are four official border crossing points located on the main roads which link Haiti and the Dominican Republic: Dajabon and Comenador in the north, and Jimani and Pedernales in the south. CESFRONT manages all the border crossing points and enforces overall border security between the Dominican Republic and Haiti. CESFRONT is composed of officials from the Dominican armed forces who rotate every two years. Most are drawn heavily from the Dominican Army (60 percent), with lesser participation by the Navy and the Air force (20 percent each).

17. (SBU) Ref B described the problems of weak border controls, corrupt border agents, and well-established routes that make illegal entry into the Dominican Republic very easy. CESFRONT officials are tasked with preventing those without proper documentation from crossing into the Dominican Republic (NOTE: Haitians without visas or temporary work permits are officially permitted to enter the DR or wade across the Massacre River only on Market Day. END NOTE). Colonel Vargas Munoz claimed, however, that the lack of coordination with Haitian authorities complicated his duties to manage security on the Dominican side. Lawyers from Solidaridad Fronteriza stated Haitians migrants often suffer extortion at the border and receive threats of deportation and/or expulsion from Dominican employers and migration officials.

18. (SBU) Vargas also confirmed trafficking and human smuggling were growing problems near the border region, especially with Haitian women and children. Several sources have reported a growing rate of Haitian children who are smuggled and trafficked by organized criminal networks ("buscones"), to exploitative forms of work, or, in the worst cases, to join gangs, work as beggars in major cities, or to become victims of the illicit sexual trade. In the last few weeks, Migration authorities repatriated over 50 Haitian children who were begging and shining shoes in the streets of Santiago. Residents complained to Migration authorities that many of the same children who were repatriated returned within a few days.

19. (SBU) Thanks to USG's assistance, notable improvements have started to develop at CESFRONT's Training Academy. U.S.

Customs and Border Control (CBP) recently sent two CBP agents to the CESFRONT Academy to give technical advice and provide border security expertise to CESFRONT officials and new officers. Although a major funding source has not been identified to fully

implement a program, CBP hopes to coordinate with other USG partners (e.g. NAS) to further support efforts in providing their oversight, guidance, and expertise in border operations in order to improve CESFRONT's basic and advanced training courses.

MEETING WITH HAITIAN CONSUL IN DEJABON

¶10. (SBU) Haitian Consul in Dajabon Jean Baptiste Bien-Aime, who approves visas for Dominicans traveling to Haiti and offers citizen services to his fellow Haitians in the DR, said that Haitians are able to register their children and receive Haitian passports at their Embassy in Santo Domingo or at any Haitian consulate. The USD 50.00 cost for a Haitian passport, on top of other administrative fees, however, is sometimes prohibitive. Moreover, he also noted that some Haitian migrants receive temporary work permits from Dominican employers, but the work permits do not authorize outside travel or grant any legal residency in the Dominican Republic.

¶11. (SBU) Bien-Aime commented that he does not have the authority to defend the labor rights of Haitian migrants, but sends Haitian migrants who face difficulties, to the Solidaridad Fronteriza, the labor rights center located in Dajabon. He also commented that the Dominican authorities are obliged to inform the Haitian consulate of deportation and/or repatriation proceedings for Haitians; however, he complained he is generally notified only after such proceedings are over and the Haitians have already been deported.

¶12. (SBU) During the conversation, the Haitian Consul informed Poloffs of a recent deportation case involving two children, born in the Dominican Republic to parents of Haitian descent. The two children were rounded up by Migration officials while they were running an errand for their mother. Both children, who had never been to Haiti or known of any family members there, were deported to Haiti without the opportunity to prove their legal status in the DR or even to contact their parents. The Consul helped obtain the return of the two children to the DR and reunited them with their family. He emphasized this situation was not a unique incident. Children born to parents of Haitian descent in the DR, he declared, find themselves at a greater risk of expulsion or deportation, especially near the border region.

¶13. (SBU) COMMENT: Serious issues of human smuggling/trafficking, illegal immigration, and crime remain near the border region. CESFRONT is taking some steps to address these issues, with CBP assistance. Emboffs, however, saw first-hand the need for improved communication between Dominican and Haitian diplomats and border officials. The Mixed Bi-National Commission, which is scheduled to meet in April, will provide an opportunity to address issues of border security, Haitian migration, and criminal activities in the border region. END COMMENT.
Lambert